

Message Text

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SUBJECT: REACTIONS TO ITALIAN CHURCH'S DECLARATION ON COMMUNISM
AND ABORTION

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SUMMARY. THIS TELEGRAM ANALYZES THE REACTIONS TO THE ITALIAN CHURCH'S NEW DECLARATION ON COMMUNISM AND ABORTION. INITIAL REACTIONS ON PART OF SOCIALISTS AND COMMUNISTS HAVE BEEN STRONG. CHURCH CRITICIZED FOR MAKING AN UNWARRANTED INTERFERENCE IN ITALIAN POLITICS, AND DECLARATION CHARACTERIZED AS REPRESENTING RETROGRESSION FROM CHURCH'S CONCILIAR LINE. THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC (DC) NEWSPAPER AND CHURCH-RELATED ORGANS, HOWEVER, STRONGLY DEFENDED CHURCH POSITION. END SUMMARY.

1. BEGIN UNCLASSIFIED THIS TELEGRAM ANALYZES REACTIONS TO DECLARATION ON COMMUNISM AND ABORTION BY THE PERMANENT COUNCIL OF THE ITALIAN BISHOPS CONFERENCE (CEI)(REFTEL). THE DECLARATION HAS PROVOKED A BARRAGE OF CRITICISM FROM THE LAY PRESS. ARGUMENTS USED AGAINST THE DECLARATION'S TWO PRINCIPAL THESES--THE INCOMPATIBILITY OF CHRISTIANITY WITH MARXISM AND THE CHURCH'S REJECTION OF LIBERALIZATION OF ABORTION--CAN BE AGGREGATED UNDER TWO BASIC THEMES: UNWARRANTED INTERFERENCE IN POLITICS AND CHURCH'S RETROGRESSION FROM CONCILIAR LINE. WHILE THERE ARE SLIGHT VARIATIONS ON THE TWO THEMES, INITIAL PUBLIC COMMENTS
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FOLLOW PREDICTABLE LINES. THE SOCIALIST ("AVANTI*") AND COMMUNIST

("L'UNITA") PRESS ORGANS

BITTERLY DENOUNCE THE CHURCH'S INTERFERENCE IN ITALIAN POLITICS. THE LEFT-OF-CENTER "IL MESSAGGERO" AND "CORRIERE DELLA SERA" GAVE PROMINENT PLAY TO REACTIONS OF COMMUNISTS AND SOCIALISTS, AND THE LATTER ALSO PUBLISHED A SCATHING FRONT-PAGE EDITORIAL REGISTERING ITS "CLEAR DISSENT" FROM THE BISHOPS' DECLARATION.

2. SUPPORT FOR THE DECLARATION APPEARS IN THE DC ORGAN "IL POPOLO", THE CATHOLIC HIERARCHY ORGAN "AVVENIRE," AND IN "L'OSSERVATORE ROMANO," THE VATICAN'S SEMI-OFFICIAL DAILY. "L'OSSERVATORE", IN A LEAD ARTICLE DEC. 17, EXPLICITLY APPLAUDS THE DECLARATION STATING THAT "THE FAITHFUL WILL BE GRATEFUL TO THE BISHOPS FOR HAVING PRONOUNCED CLEAR, FIRM AND DIRECTION-GIVING WORDS". IT CONSIDERS THE DECLARATION AS EVIDENCE OF THE REAWAKENING OF THE CATHOLIC CONSCIENCE AND A SIGN THAT THE "HOUR OF RESPONSIBLE DISCERNMENT" HAD ARRIVED. THE TIME FOR AMBIGUITY, ACCORDING TO THE NEWSPAPER'S VICE DIRECTOR, MUST BE ENDED AND CHRISTIANS MUST MAKE COHERENT CHOICES IN SOCIAL LIFE AND VIGOROUSLY COUNTERPOSE THEIR IDEAS AND ORIENTATIONS.

3. CLEARLY ANTICIPATING CHARGES THAT THE DECLARATION REPRESENTS A RETROGRESSION FROM THE CONCILIAR LINE, "POPOLO," "AVVENIRE" AND "L'OSSERVATORE" TAKE PAINS IN PORTRAYING IT AS CONGRUENT WITH SPECIFIC LANGUAGE CONTAINED IN CONCILIAR DOCUMENTS SUCH AS "MATER ET MAGISTRA" AND THE ENCYCLICAL "PACEM IN TERRIS". THEY IMPLY THAT CHURCH MAY HAVE ABDICATED TEMPORARILY ITS RESPONSIBILITY BY TOLERATING ERRONEOUS EXEGESIS OF THESE DOCUMENTS.

4. "L'UNITA", IN ARTICLE DEC. 17 SIGNED BY ITS EDITOR, STATES THAT THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT THE DECLARATION CONSTITUTES GROSS INTERVENTION AGAINST FREEDOM OF POLITICAL CHOICE AND AGAINST THE POLITICAL AUTONOMY OF CATHOLIC CITIZENS. IT FURTHER ASSERTS THAT BESIDES BEING AN UNWARRANTED INTERFERENCE IN ITALIAN POLITICAL LIFE, IT RAISES VERY DELICATE AND COMPLEX QUESTIONS REGARDING THE TYPE OF REGIME WHICH COULD OR SHOULD PREVAIL IN CHURCH-STATE RELATIONS, AND THAT THE DECLARATION VIOLATES THE CONCORDAT. WITH REGARD TO ABORTION ISSUE, "L'UNITA" SPECIFICALLY DENIES ANY WISH TO CONTEST THE CHURCH'S RIGHT TO SUSTAIN ITS OWN PRINCIPLES AND TO INVITE CATHOLICS TO ADHERE TO THEM. IT INSISTS, HOWEVER, THAT THE CHURCH SHOULD NOT IMPOSE THESE PRINCIPLES ON

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THE "COLLECTIVITY", AND CONSIDERS CHURCH'S CALL ON PARLIAMENT NOT TO LEGISLATE AN "INADMISSIBLE INTERFERENCE". THE PAPER FURTHER UNDERLINES THE EXISTENCE OF A GRAVE SOCIAL SITUATION REGARDING ABORTION AND CALLS ATTENTION TO FACT THAT, IF PARLIAMENT DOES NOT ACT, THE ISSUE WILL GO TO REFERENDUM, THEREBY INTRODUCING ELEMENTS OF TURBULENCE IN THE NATION'S POLITICAL LIFE. IT ALSO STATES THAT THE RESULTS OF THE REFERENDUM CAN BE FORECAST--THE FASCIST LAW WOULD BE ABROGATED, ITS DEFENDERS DEFEATED, AND THERE

WILL BE TOTAL ABORTION LIBERALIZATION. THE ARTICLE CONCLUDES BY A STRONG REAFFIRMATION OF THE LAY STATE AND AUTONOMY OF POLITICAL LIFE ON THE BASIS OF EXCLUSION OF ALL INTEGRALISM--WHETHER CONFESSIOAL OR OF OTHER IDEOLOGICAL ORIGIN--AND CALLS FOR CONSTRUCTIVE COOPERATION OF FORCES OF DIFFERENT VALUES IN SOLVING SOCIAL PROBLEMS.

5. "AVANTI*", THE SOCIALIST PARTY ORGAN, IN AN EDITORIAL DEC. 17, CALLS THE DECLARATION AN "ACT OF EXCEPTIONAL GRAVITY" AND ACCUSES THE BISHOPS OF GROSS INTERFERENCE IN PARLIAMENTARY DECISIONS. INTERESTINGLY ENOUGH, HOWEVER, IT ALSO STATES: "WE STILL DO NOT HAVE SUFFICIENT PROOF TO ESTABLISH IF IT REPRESENTS AN UNHAPPY EPISODE OR IF WE FIND OURSELVES AT A TURNING POINT OF THE CATHOLIC HIERARCHY'S POLITICS IN A CALCULATED REACTIONARY SENSE." STATING THAT THE DECLARATION INTRODUCES HARSH TENSION, UNDERCUTS CURRENT DC DIRECTION IN FAVOR OF CLERICALISM AND INTEGRALISM, IT CRITICIZES THE CHURCH FOR PREPARING THE GROUND FOR "FRONTAL CONFLICT".
END UNCLASSIFIED.

6. BEGIN CONFIDENTIAL COMMENT:THE BISHOPS' DECLARATION HAS ADDED ANOTHER ELEMENT IN THE CHURCH'S NEW COURSE AGAINST COMMUNISM. IT IS BY FAR THE MOST IMPORTANT ANTI-MARXIST STATEMENT THAT THE CHURCH HAS MADE IN RECENT YEARS.

7. THE TONE AND TIMING OF THE DECLARATION HAVE SURPRISED MANY VATICAN OBSERVERS, ESPECIALLY THOSE WHO BELIEVED THAT STATEMENT WOULD NOT FULLY REAFFIRM CARDINAL POLETTI'S STRONG ANTI-MARXIST LINE. SOME THOUGHT THAT CHURCH NEEDED PCI SUPPORT ON ABORTION ISSUE AND, SINCE PARLIAMENT IS CURRENTLY ENGAGED IN AMENDING THE ABORTION LAW, THEY REASONED THAT THE CHURCH WOULD NOT WANT AT THIS JUNCTURE TO ANTAGONIZE PCI. (IN FACT, THE PCI, BY SUPPORTING ONLY MILD REVISION, HAS BROKEN WITH SOLID LAY PARTY PARLIAMENTARY GROUPING AND ALSO WITH RANK AND FILE MILITANTS WHO DESIRE TOTAL
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ABORTION FREEDOM. IN THIS CONNECTION, SOME OBSERVERS THOUGH THAT VATICAN CONSULTATIONS WITH PCI ON ABORTION MIGHT TAKE PLACE AND THAT IN THIS WAY CHURCH WOULD ONCE AGAIN BLUR ITS IMAGE ON ACTIVE ANTI-MARXISM.)

8. THE BISHOPS WERE FACED WITH MOUNTING PRESSURE TO CLARIFY THE CHURCH'S POSITION ON THE HISTORIC COMPROMISE AND SEVERAL ANALYSTS OF VATICAN AFFAIRS HAVE TOLD US THAT VATICAN OFFICIALS INTERVENED DURING CLOSED DOOR MEETING OF THE CEI COUNCIL TO ENCOURAGE IT TO REAFFIRM POLETTI LINE. SOME OBSERVERS HAVE ALSO NOTED THAT, GIVEN BOTH THE DISINTEGRATED STATE OF CATHOLIC GROUPS AND OF THE DC PARTY, THERE WAS CONVERGENCE OF LIBERAL AND CONSERVATIVE BISHOPS ON THE THESIS THAT "UNITY" ON THE QUESTION OF COMMUNISM WAS NECESSARY.

9. ALTHOUGH THE DECLARATION'S CALL ON CATHOLICS TO PARTICIPATE
IN PURSUIT OF SOCIAL JUSTICE HAS BEEN INTERPRETED AS A SIGNAL
FOR POSITIVE ACTION, THIS THEME IS NOT ADEQUATELY FOCUSED OR
STRESSED IN RECENT CHURCH PRONOUNCEMENTS. MOREOVER, THE ITALIAN
CHURCH'S JUSTICE AND PEACE OMISSION IS YET TO BE HEARD FROM.
VATICAN SOURCES HAVE INFORMED US, HOWEVER, THAT THE BISHOPS ARE
EXPECTED TO ISSUE FURTHER STATEMENTS, INCLUDING A COMPREHENSIVE ONE
ON SOCIAL ISSUES. END CONFIDENTIAL VOLPE

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